

## **Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center Avalanche Advisory**

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Good Morning, this is Oly with the Idaho Panhandle avalanche advisory, valid for today, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010. This report does not apply to local ski areas within the forecast region and will remain in effect through midnight, February 5<sup>th</sup>. The outlook for the weekend is for periods of snowfall but in moderate amounts with more accumulation expected to the south. Thanks to the Idaho Parks and Recreation for their continued support of the forecast.

### **WEATHER**

At 0600 this morning mountain air temperatures are hovering in the mid to high 20s and winds are light. No new snow has fallen in the last 24 hours and snow accumulation for the past week has been variable piddling along at about a foot in the Cabinets and only 6" in the upper Priest Lake area near the Canadian Border. Snow depths above 5,000 feet across our forecast area are ranging from 5-6 feet which is below normal by about 25% across the forecast area. The mild weather has had a stabilizing influence on the snowpack but there are some locations where you'll still need to use caution because of persistent weak layers. For today, the NWS is calling for increasingly cloudy conditions as the next storm moves into our region, temperatures will rise to the mid 30s and winds will be light. The outlook for Saturday is calling for decreasing chances of snow as the day progresses with light accumulations during the day possible. By Sunday it looks like the forecast area is in for a clearing period with fog in the valleys and clear in the mountains. Avalanche conditions will continue to stabilize with the predicted weather for the outlook period.

**Avalanche conditions for the Selkirk and Cabinet Mountains are rated as MODERATE on wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 5,000 feet.**

Natural avalanches are unlikely and human triggered avalanches are possible.

**Avalanche conditions are rated as LOW on all other slopes above 5,000 feet.** Natural and human triggered avalanches are unlikely.

#### Snowpack

In the Selkirk Mountains at Phoebe's Tip yesterday at 5400 feet we found about 6 feet of total snowpack on a north aspect. Traces of surface hoar were evident about 6" down but the warm temperatures have done their magic and bonding. Our pit tests revealed a warming snowpack with two weak layers. The upper weak layer was 6" feet deep with new snow over a denser layer. This was the layer that is most likely to fail. There are several layers of old faceted snow but they are bridged by thick ice layers and going ET nicely. In the Cabinets Kevin and Eric found a foot of new snow and similar easy shears on the older bed surface. I am surmising that this new snow came an inch or two at a

time over the last week and has bonded to itself pretty well. The problem is the interface with the bed surface but this is variable to aspect and elevation. Sliding conditions were variable.

#### Terrain

How do you interpret the condition of our snowpack right now? You can get around very easily in the mountains right now, as long as there is snow cover. We saw numerous avalanches on steep northerly aspects just below cornices and ridgelines. The big terrain is accessible but I would be cautious. The southern aspects showed signs of wet sluffs, snowballing and point releases. Just a few minutes of the powerful rays of the sun or heavy rain could increase the hazard to **CONSIDERABLE**. Conservative lines up to 35 degrees with less exposure are a better choice. Be aware of windslabs near ridgelines that could be more unstable than the surrounding snow. We saw older snowmobile tracks in some very steep terrain.

**Avalanche conditions for the St. Regis Basin are rated as MODERATE on slopes steeper than 35 degrees above 5,000 feet.** Natural avalanches are unlikely, *human triggered* avalanches are possible. **Avalanche conditions are rated as LOW on all other slopes above 5,000 feet.** Natural and human triggered avalanches are unlikely.

#### Snowpack

On Lookout Pass, in about 5 feet of snow Carole and Dan were out with Steve Karkanen and Dudley Improta from the West Central Montana Avalanche Center. They found a settling snowpack with multiple layers of melt-freeze. The weakest layer she found was new snow from the last week. Warming conditions and rain could cause problems. Just a few minutes of the powerful rays of the sun or heavy rain could increase the hazard to **CONSIDERABLE**. Other stress tests did not produce results indicating major weak layers within the pack. She noted much snowmobiling activity in the Basin and observed that tracks were in the big open bowls and wind-loaded areas with no indication of slides.

#### Terrain

Once you get up into the high country you can travel quite easily. You could find yourself in a high consequence situation if you are not careful. Although our pack is settling and relatively stable, we do have a persistent weak layer that most likely is intact enough on cold northerly aspects that you could be the trigger. Steep terrain below cornices and rocky ridges seem to be the sour spot where natural avalanches have run in the past. Just a few minutes of the powerful rays of the sun or heavy rain could increase the hazard .

#### Snowpack

Ed was able to access Siwash Peak area south east of Avery. At 5700' they found a very reactive surface hoar layer at about a foot down on a NNW slope. This layer broke out with light to moderate force, cleanly and over the entire column on an Extended Column test. There are several layers below that but are well bridged. Ed relayed that higher terrain on the Northerly aspects that this weak layer could be even more fragile, **Avalanche conditions for the St Joe Mountains are rated as CONSIDERABLE on wind-loaded northern aspects greater than 35 degrees above 5,500 feet.** Natural avalanches are possible and human triggered avalanches are probable. **Avalanche**

conditions are rated as **MODERATE** on all other slopes above 5,000 feet. Natural avalanches are unlikely, *human triggered* avalanches are **possible**.

#### Terrain

Snow packs are low below 5000'. Above that elevation southerly slopes with just a few minutes of the powerful rays of the sun or heavy rain could increase the hazard.

The next round of (***Free***) avalanche workshops for snowmobilers is coming up. Closer to home in Sandpoint we will be meeting at the County Building on the 12<sup>th</sup> at 7PM for a 2 hour class and the next morning at 8AM up the Pack River at the trailhead. On February 26<sup>th</sup> go to the USFS building in St. Maries at 7PM for the class and the next day at the Syringa Creek trailhead for the field session. Don't miss the class offered in Priest Lake on March 5<sup>th</sup> at the Groomer Shed at 7PM and then the field session will head out on Saturday from the Lionhead parking lot. For more information go to the Idaho Parks and Recreation Department website at [www.parksandrecreation.idaho.gov](http://www.parksandrecreation.idaho.gov), or call Marc Hildesheim, North Region Trails Specialist, at (208) 769-1511.

The Panhandle Avalanche Center in Sandpoint and Sandpoint Parks and Recreation is sponsoring free avalanche workshops for all snowgoers. "Decision Making in the Backcountry" workshops will be offered on 2/10/10. These are offered at the old Federal Building in Sandpoint and are ***Free to the public***. For class schedules in the Silver Valley contact Dan Frigard at 783-2130. In Avery contact Ed Odegaard at 245-6209.

If you have a group or club that is interested in more education on avalanche safety we will be available for free avalanche awareness classes beginning in December, so feel free to give us a call. As usual we would appreciate hearing from anyone who happens to observe any recent avalanche activity while out in the backcountry or just wants to let us know what is going on in their area. You can reach Kevin Davis in Sandpoint by calling (208) 265-6686.

Avalanche conditions change for better or worse continually. Backcountry travelers should be prepared to assess current conditions for themselves, plan their routes of travel accordingly, and never travel alone. Backcountry travelers can reduce their exposure to avalanche hazards by utilizing timbered trails and ridge routes and by avoiding open and exposed terrain with slope angles of 30 degrees or more. Backcountry travelers should carry the necessary avalanche rescue equipment such as a shovel, avalanche probe or probe ski poles, a rescue beacon and a well-equipped first aid kit.

Have a safe and pleasant weekend.